

Book reviews

Précis de dermatologie et vénéréologie. Ed JH Saurat, E Grosshans, P Laugier, JM La Chapelle, 1986. Masson, Paris. Pp 661, 17 pp index. Black and white and colour illustrations. Price not given.

At the time of the Second World Congress in Paris, it is a pleasure to review a précis of dermatology and venereology edited by the professors of dermatology at Geneva (two), Strasbourg, and Louvain, with no fewer than 98 contributors encompassing francophone dermatologists not only from France, but also from Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Tunisia, and Senegal. There are two noted Anglo-Saxon contributors, Dawber of Oxford and Winkelmann of Rochester, New York, United States of America.

The object of the tome is primarily to assist doctors, especially in dermatology at the intern stage. Its other main role is to act as an aide memoire for the practising dermatologist. It gives a short, factual, up to date description (not only clinical, but pathological, immunological, and pharmacological) of any dermatological condition that could possibly present, including some very rare diagnoses. It is assumed that there is already an undergraduate knowledge of dermatology.

The concept of a major contribution from French speaking countries was to bring about a French dermatological comprehensive work to counteract the influence of major English tomes, which the editors admit most dermatological interns now use. The concept came about in 1984 and the publishers are to be congratulated on a gestation period of only two years.

The work is amazingly comprehensive, and there is an up to date bibliography at the end of each section. Review articles up to 1985 are included. The classic European way of presentation of dermatovenereology is described. Most of the sexually transmitted diseases are included in the sections edited by Grosshans on infectious cutaneous disease. In fact the classic venereal diseases are compressed to a mere 10 pages. Their description, investigation, and treatment is therefore didactic, and really cannot be recommended. There is a nice description of endemic syphilis and yaws by contributors from Bordeaux, Dakar, and Strasbourg. As

with many multiauthor texts, some hopping around is necessary if the reader is to squeeze out all the information contained. Genital wart virus infection (near the beginning of the text) is described well, with good histological pictures. Much later there is an excellent section on the pathology of the female (by Pelisse) and male (by Colomb) genital mucous membranes. Pelisse describes the classification of 1975 of the International Society for the Study of Vulvar Disease.

There are excellent sections on the skin and the psyche. An orderly approach to anogenital pruritus by Barrière is the best I have ever read. The last part of the work is devoted to all aspects of treatment.

The first class illustrations have been financed by many well known pharmaceutical firms. This book, a splendid work produced in a short time, is a must for anyone interested in modern ideas in dermatovenereology from the French speaking world. A quotation at the start needs no explanation.

"Connaître ce n'est pas démontrer ni expliquer.
C'est accéder à la vision...
Cela est dur apprentissage."
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.)

M A Waugh

A treatise of the venereal diseases. By Jean Astruc. Translated by William Barrowby, 1737. Garland Publishing, London and New York. In 2 volumes, (1)pp 490, (2)pp 502. Price US\$110.

This is one of a facsimile series of some 50 books in 30 volumes, entitled *Marriage, Sex, and the Family*, being published by Garland Publishing under the editorship of Randolph Trumbach. With the present publication, 12 volumes are now available.

Of the 50 books, nearly half concern marriage, 13 concern prostitutes, seven homosexuality, and three the venereal diseases. These last include John Marten's *A treatise of all degrees and symptoms of the venereal disease in both sexes*, originally published in London in 1708-9 (US\$50.50) and William Buchan's *Observations concerning the prevention and cure of the venereal disease*, originally published in

London in 1796 (US\$30.50).

In terms of sociosexual milieux, the eighteenth and twentieth centuries have many parallels, not least in terms of liberation and licence and the public and professional responses to changing attitudes and behaviour. Thus while William Hogarth in his *Moralities* railed against the follies and vices of his day, we find Marten and Buchan joining the other writers of the series in giving straightforward advice for a well regulated and healthy sex life. So, for today's "safe sex", read "marriage" and "conjugal fidelity".

Jean Astruc (1685-1766) had a more thoroughly medical approach. He was physician to the king of France and a noted writer, not only on syphilis but also on obstetrics. He was the first to describe blennorrhagia ophthalmica. His clinical practice was extensive. His book is a systematic recording of all the early works on venereal disease available in Europe in the early part of the eighteenth century. He collates and correlates the data with both clinical skill and detailed thoroughness. He deals in turn with "the venereal's" nature, cause, contagiousness, course, and cure. We note that whereas others of the time may have been hesitant or reticent about describing clinical appearances, Astruc is devoid of squeamishness. Also, unlike so many others, he took a great deal of interest in the diseases of women, and this is reflected in the present work.

In addition, Astruc lists and summarises all his sources of information. He goes even further and crowns his reference work with a thumbnail sketch of each author he quotes, in what might justly be called a bio-bibliography.

As now available the Barrowby translation of Astruc's work is well and faithfully reproduced on fine paper, bound in tasteful cloth boards. The price for the two volumes, at US\$110 compares favourably with the reviewer's rare clean copy originals, in worn calf covered boards with renewed spines, considered now to have a market value of £150 (US\$225).

Those with any interest in medicosocial history and pathology should not miss the opportunity to avail themselves of a selection from this series.

R S Morton